

Measuring Social Studies Critical Roles of Empowering Student's Civic Competence in Overcoming Gender Issues to Enhance Sustainable New World

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Abstract

The escalating reports of gender issues, particularly violence against women and girls across Nigeria, through the media are worrisome. This raises further questions on the roles of Social Studies in overcoming these concerns hindering societal peace for sustainable development. The researchers adopted a descriptive design to examine the knowledge and attitudes including social skills standards gained from Social Studies to help realize a new world order on gender issues in the society. A sample size of 200 respondents was chosen through a non-probability sampling method using a purposive sampling technique. The study adopted a quantitative method approach for data collection. The findings revealed high knowledge awareness of gender issues among respondents while attitudes and social skills gained recorded only moderate level of knowledge awareness. Also, findings showed a statistically significant difference between students' knowledge of gender issues and their social skills for emotional intelligence to deal with gender issues around them. Recommendations were made for teachers to scale up lesson emphasis towards helping students to develop required soft skills as solutions in responding to gender issues around them.

Keywords: civic competence, gender, gender issues, new world, social studies, sustainable development

The safety of women and girl-children is becoming blurred daily through the surge in violence and rooted discriminatory differences between gender groups in Nigeria. This situation is alarming as it increases broken homes, health and psychological trauma, hinders viable economic growth and weakens the foundation of social values with national development of the country (Anyabelechi, 2016). Gender issues do not slow down economic growth only but are more damaging to health, social relationships and are destructive to the lives of younger generations being raised in such environments. There are countless avoidable deaths, irreparable body damages and often transfer of aggression that make many victims to slip into depression. The year 2022 makes it 27 years since the landmark World Conference on Women in Beijing promoting the rights and

equality of women and girl-children (UN Women, 2020). However, despite the United Nations efforts to achieve gender parity, unfolding events across Nigeria show the situation is unabated. Women are less than 50% of Nigeria's population yet they occupy more than 70% poverty rate in the country (Ayodele, 2022). Women continuously face gender challenges such as unequal access to power, gender-based division of labour, hostile working environments, e.tc; as many programmes targeting gender issues seem to be failing in Nigeria (Olonade et al., 2021).

Social Studies has been differently defined by authors. Some defined it based on knowledge structure, others based on purpose and some based on the curricular or instructional criteria (Coleman, 2021). For instance, based on purpose, Jorgensen (2017) stated that Social Studies as a subject, arms its learners with essential tools to be dynamic citizens for effective relationships. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, n.d.) defined it as an integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence and to help students make informed and reasoned decisions for public good (Olusanya, 2020; Coleman, 2021). NCSS's definition was based on knowledge structure and purpose. The civic competence purpose of Social Studies is the subject's potential to build knowledge, skills and attitudes of students to function effectively as citizens. Notably also, promoting civic competence is neither limited to Social Studies alone nor is it its only responsibility, but civic competence is a central goal of Social Studies than what is obtainable in other subjects (NCSS, n.d.). Birabil and Nwankwo (2020) cited Mezieobi's comprehensive definition of Social Studies as a formalised, correlated or integrated study of man and his environment, which imbues the learner with the cognition, skills, values, attitudes, abilities and competencies that will enable him become an informed, rational, analytical, participative and functional citizen in his environment and beyond. The above definitions clearly confirm the diversity in definitions of Social Studies.

The harmonized subjects project at the Upper Basic Education level (Junior Secondary) made Social Studies a component part of a new subject title named "National Values' Education" (NVE). The NVE comprises of three curriculum themes namely Social Studies, Civic Education and Security Education (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council [NERDC], 2012). Although the primary objectives of Social Studies include inculcating right types of values and attitudes in learners, developing students' ability to adapt to a changing environment with focus on national unity, etc., Coleman (2021) admitted that Social Studies has different patterns of use in different countries. However, the current curriculum harmonization approach was found to be inadequate. According to Abunimye et al. (2020), the unnecessary split into themes affects the instruction, classroom procedures, feelings and earlier integrative approaches to issues in Social Studies. This includes the non-continuation of Social Studies as a whole at senior secondary level. The authors also called for a review of the curriculum to reflect problems affecting national

integration in Nigeria, democratization of the teaching approaches and a holistic continuation of Social Studies at the senior secondary level (Abunimye et al., 2020; Olusanya, 2020). Similarly, Engebretson in Coleman (2021) critiqued the NCSS standards for inadequate representation of gender cum inexplicit guidance on gender. Bernard-Powers (2001) posited that Social Studies has critical roles in ensuring gender equity by providing highlights on gender issues and dealing with gender identities and dynamics.

Social Studies imparts knowledge through provision of information, builds values to shape learners' attitudes to issues and also equips them with skills for practical action in diverse situations. NERDC (2012) listed four sub-themes in Social Studies curriculum as; knowledge strand which are fundamentals of Social Studies, family as the basic unit of society, culture and social values, and Social and health issues. The following topics are covered in the Social Studies curriculum such as: history and objectives of Social Studies, roles and responsibilities of family members as part of a primary social group, consequences of large and small family groups, components of culture, agents and processes of socialization, common social problems in Nigeria, individuals' roles in promoting safety in the society, readiness and purposes of marriage, positive group behaviours, et cetera. The new curriculum selected seven main values to promote desirable attitudes but not as separate topics. These values are honesty, regard for others' interests, justice, discipline, right attitude to work, courage and national consciousness with the expectation that these will turnaround the social climate of Nigeria.

The social skills known as soft skills are to promote social abilities for meaningful and productive interactions among people. These help to handle emotions well even in uncomfortable situations (Positive Action, 2020). The skills include effective communication, ability for conflict resolution, active listening, empathy, relationship management and respect for others' space (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). Ravenscraft (2020) explained that these skills are better learned through exposure to group dynamics (relationships with peers and adults) as a child, and having positive role models to pattern after. The skills are therefore important, as they serve as the foundation for effective interaction and emotional intelligence. Although the skill dimension is foundational for effective interaction, it is basically an individual process in nature, indicating the level of developmental change of a person but can be improved upon through intervention. Children learn well by seeing themselves from others' perspectives during their late childhood (late adolescent) stage. This is why interventions for social skills must promote socio-emotional awareness of students. The context for development of social skills cuts across home, schools, online and offline; and between relationship with peers and adults (Junge et al., 2020).

Some of the theories relevant to promoting adolescents' sensitivity to others and building of healthy relationships include social contact theory, developmental systems theory, social learning theory and emotional theory. The students are empowered to gain social and emotional competence in order to

adapt and equally engage in positive actions expected of them in the society. This study hereby adopted the emotional theory to scrutinize the acquisition of civic competence through Social Studies due to its focus on helping youths not only to identify and understand their own emotion, but also to manage effectively while expressing their emotions (Kenny & Minor, 2016).

Theory of Emotional Intelligence- Daniel Goleman (1995)

According to Resilient Educator (2020), Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory made great impact on education, recognizing EI as important as intelligent quotient (IQ). This influenced many curricula to incorporate social and emotional learning for students. Daniel suggests five competencies as complimentary skills to effectively relate with people and manage situations well. These are self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy and social skills (possessing tactics to get along with people without exerting control on them). The essence is for learners to use emotions to guide their cognitive thinking and to regulate their emotions for the good of all. The EI helps to reduce bullying, violence and other behavioural problems in schools; and boosts academic performance due to its internal motivation competency. Teachers need to know that no emotion is wrong but certain ways of expressing it can be inappropriate. Emotions therefore are part of human experiences and individuals have the right to express them otherwise suppressing their expression can become dangerous. Therefore, what is crucial is to learn positive management of feelings (Kashdan et al., 2015). EI serves as a tool for assessing the civic competence in Social Studies (Sfetcu, 2020).

Gender and Socialisation

The term gender is socially constructed arising from what people learned through their cultures and role playing in the society. It has been noted also that the African and Nigerian system entrenches male superiority over the females leading to rebellion, tension, and frustrated relationships in the societies (Olonade et. al., 2021). Since expression of gender comes through socialization and goes beyond mere biological word for male and female categories of people (Kashdan, et al, 2015; Anyabelechi, 2016), Social Studies has a role to help students learn positively, relearn and unlearn perceived negative cultural norms they might have earlier acquired in the society. Gender issues generate concerns between males and females which include discrimination; violence; harmful practices; poor reproductive health information against women and girl-children; lack of value of women's unpaid work at home; unequal access to money; power sharing and leadership positions; sexual abuse and denial of inheritance rights to women and girl-children, job stereotype; etc (Anyabelechi, 2016; European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2014; Olonade, et al; 2021; United Nations Foundation, 2016). These together represent all forms of inequality suffered by women and girls in the societies but gender-based violence against women was pointed out as the most prominent area (Anyabelechi, 2016; EIGE, 2014). Morse (2020) citing Antonio Guterres admitted that various gender issues rob females of their

human dignity, security and meaningful contributions to the development of the society.

Addressing gender issues is a clear commitment to promoting the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) stated as "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (Morse, 2020). The United Nations (2016) recognizes the matter of dignity of persons as fundamental to fostering peaceful co-existence. The new world agenda is significant including gender equality and empowering females to achieve their full potential in dignity. The new world permits everyone to flourish without fear and exploitation; and is summarily captioned as a just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world that meets the needs of the vulnerable ones. This shows that achieving social peace by resolving gender issues is important to the attainment of the new world. Leach (2022) supported the United Nations (2016) that a multifaceted, integrated approach will efficiently resolve gender issues in any society. Morse (2020) and Leach (2022) identified action steps that can reduce gender issues to include provision of equal protection under the law for women and children, removing gender discriminating laws in the constitution; enhancing safety of female gender by stopping gender-based violence, etc. However, Morse (2020) identified a major drawback to resolving gender issues as lack of political will to pursue the goal as a priority. This study therefore focuses on measuring the dimensions of civic competence of students through Social Studies roles in addressing gender issues.

The study specifically sought to:

- i. examine the extent of students' knowledge on gender issues from Social Studies contents.
- ii. find out how strong students' attitudes are towards observed gender issues around them.
- iii. determine extent to which Social Studies students are equipped with social skills to emotionally deal with gender issues around them.

Research Questions

In order to guide this study, three research questions and two hypotheses were raised:

- i. What is the extent of students' knowledge on gender issues from Social Studies contents?
- ii. How strong in attitude are students' attitudes towards observed gender issues around them?
- iii. To what extent are Social Studies students equipped with social skills to emotionally deal with prevailing gender issues around them?

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between female students' knowledge of gender issues and their attitudes towards gender issues around them.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to explore the role of Social Studies in responding to gender issues. A quantitative method through questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire titled "Social Studies and Gender Issues" (SSaGI) contained 34 adapted items rated on a 5-Point Likert scale. The items measured students' awareness, disposition and skills to deal with gender issues. These dimensions altogether made up the civic competence expected to be achieved.

The area of study covered public senior secondary schools within Agbado / Oke-Odo Local Council Development Area (LCDA), Alimosho Local Government Area – Lagos State. Agbado / Oke-Odo LCDA is a fast-growing community (Sokan, 2021). This LCDA was chosen being a local community in the interior of Lagos and possibly expected that the inhabitants may likely still be influenced by socio-cultural beliefs. A sample size of 200 respondents was chosen through a non-probability sampling method using a purposive sampling technique. This comprised of 100 girls and 100 boys (students in senior secondary class, SS1) for gender parity's sake.

The questionnaire had content validity determined by two Social Studies experts on face value judgment of the items. The instrument's reliability measure was quantified using the Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient which yielded 0.856 and 0.78 respectively. The process of administration and clear language usage also reduced bias in question interpretation. Data collected was analysed using mean, standard deviation and a T-test analysis. Tables and rich narrative format were used to present the data outcome. The Legend used for descriptive data interpretation was as follows:

1.00 – 1.79	Very Low
1.80 – 2.59	Low
2.60 – 3.39	Moderate
3.40 – 4.19	High
4.20 – 5.00	Very High

Results

Research Question 1: What is the extent of students' knowledge on gender issues from Social Studies contents?

Table 1 shows that students' awareness was tested on five major concerns of gender issues which are: gender-based violence, gender wage gap, gender discrimination, understanding gender equality and female representation in decision making. The 10 items covering the five concerned area of gender issues generated a grand mean of 3.47 indicating that a high level of awareness was attained by the respondents. Responses were generally closed to the groups mean with 0.13 standard deviation score. The respondents showed a very high awareness of gender discrimination with a mean score of 4.34 from both males and females. However, while the females' general mean score of 3.65 was a high level of awareness on gender issue concerns, the males had a 3.29 mean that

Table 1
Extent of Students' Knowledge on Gender Issues

S/ N	Knowledge of Concerns on Gender Issues	Male Mean	Female Mean	Av. Mean	$X-\bar{X}$	$(X-\bar{X})^2$
<i>Gender Based Violence</i>						
1	Marrying off girl child before age 18 is far better	4.36	4.64	4.5	1.03	1.0609
2	A man has total control over his wife's body at anytime	2.88	3.60	3.24	-0.23	0.0529
	<i>Average</i>			4.12		
<i>Gender Wage Gap</i>						
3	Working women take away jobs from the men	3.76	4.12	3.94	0.47	0.2209
4	Men should earn higher salaries than women doing same jobs	2.56	3.84	3.2	-0.27	0.0729
	<i>Average</i>			3.94		
<i>Gender Discrimination</i>						
5	Child marriage makes girls obedient as wives	3.44	4.36	3.9	0.43	0.1849
6	Tertiary education is not important for the girls	3.92	4.32	4.12	0.65	0.4225
	<i>Average</i>			4.34		
<i>Understanding Gender Equality</i>						
7	Women are the same with men because of gender equality	3.44	2.89	3.14	-0.33	0.1089
8	Females are not mostly affected by gender issues	2.84	2.92	2.88	-0.59	0.3481
	<i>Average</i>			2.88		
<i>Female Representation at Decision-making Level</i>						
9	Paying women for domestic works done is important	3.20	2.96	3.08	-0.39	0.1521
10	Full decision making on major matters at home is for the man	2.52	2.92	2.72	-0.75	0.5625
	<i>Average</i>			2.94		
	Grand Average	3.29	3.65	3.47		3.1866
		SD=0.18	SD= 0.21			SD=0.13

indicated only a moderate level of awareness. The SD of 0.21 (females) and 0.18 (males) respectively showed a closely clustered response to each group's mean as seen in Table 1 above.

Research Question 2: How strong in attitude are the students towards observed gender issues around them?

Table 2 reveals that the general students' attitudes towards gender issues was moderate with a grand mean score of 2.89 while their responses clustered closely around the groups' mean score as shown through 0.23 standard deviation score.

Table 2

Males and Females Students' Attitudes towards Gender Issues

S/ N	Attitudes Towards Gender Issues	Male Mean	Female Mean	Total X	\bar{X}	$(X-\bar{X})^2$
11	A woman should tolerate beating by her man in order to keep her home	4.44	4.36	4.4	1.51	2.2801
12	Mothers are so strong that they cope well with sicknesses	2.28	2.28	2.28	-0.61	0.3721
13	A woman's most important role is cooking for the family	1.56	1.84	1.57	-1.32	1.7424
14	It is a woman's responsibility to avoid getting pregnant	4.28	3.36	3.82	0.93	0.8649
15	A man should have the final word about building a house	2.66	2.76	2.72	-0.17	0.0289
16	To be a man you need to be tough	3.04	3.20	3.12	0.23	0.0529
17	Girl's choice of life partner should be determined by family members	3.76	4.52	4.14	1.25	1.5625
18	Early marriage prevents girls from prostitution	3.20	3.72	3.46	0.57	0.3249
19	Girls' dressing is the cause of their being raped	2.04	2.44	2.24	-0.65	0.4225
20	Problems between people are best handled by working	0.92	1.28	1.1	-1.79	3.2041
Grand Average		2.82 <i>SD=0.35</i>	2.98 <i>SD= 0.34</i>	2.89		SD= 0.23

Both male and female students showed moderate attitudes with 2.82 and 2.98 mean scores respectively.

Research Question 3: To what extent are Social Studies students equipped with social skills to emotionally to deal with prevailing gender issues around them?

Table 3 shows that the respondents generally possessed a moderate level of social skills on gender issues with a 2.85 mean score. Responses are not too spread away from the mean also with standard deviation score of 0.11. Six areas of social skills depicting emotional intelligence were tested including communication and self-awareness (items 21-24); social encoding (understanding social situations, items 25-26); problem-solving skills (items 27-28); emotional regulation (items 29-30); empathy (items 31-32); and self-motivation (items 33-34). The respondents indicated a high level of the social skill of emotional regulation with a mean score of 3.21, while moderate levels of emotional intelligence were indicated across other social skill areas with 2.81, 2.75, 2.98, 2.56 and 2.81. Generally, both male and female responses showed a moderate social skill level on emotional intelligence to deal with gender issues.

Table 3

Students' Social Skills for Emotional Intelligence to Deal with Gender Issues

S/ N	Social Activities	Total Score	Male Mean	Female Mean	Av. Mean	X- \bar{X}	(X- \bar{X}) ²
Communication and Self-awareness							
21	I initiate conversation with my peers often	496	2.48	2.48	2.48	-0.37	0.1369
22	Asking further explanations when talking with friends is common with me	648	3.24	3.24	3.24	0.39	0.1521
23	Taking turns during discussion makes me slow to forget my points	452	2.08	2.44	2.26	-0.59	0.3481
24	Interacting with people is enjoyable for me	652	3.04	3.48	3.26	0.41	0.1681
Average					2.81		
Social Encoding							
25	I am quick in identifying faces	600	2.88	3.12	3.00	0.15	0.0225
26	Interpreting facial expression is easier for me	500	2.20	2.80	2.5	-0.35	0.1225
Average					2.75		
Problem-solving							
27	I resolve conflicts with my mates easily	624	3.20	3.04	3.12	0.29	0.0729
28	Responding with aggression does not work well for me in any group	568	3.00	2.68	2.84	-0.01	0.0001
Average					2.98		
Emotional Regulation							
29	I am able to predict others' responses to my actions	604	3.28	2.76	3.02	0.17	0.0289
30	I often intentionally control my feeling to prevent hurting others	680	3.52	3.28	3.4	0.55	0.3025
Average					3.21		
Empathy							
31	It is alright for people to feel differently about the same issue	584	2.76	3.08	2.92	0.07	0.49
32	I expect my friends to reason like me on the same issues	440	2.12	2.28	2.2	-0.65	0.4225
Average					2.56		
Self-motivation							
33	I make sacrifices to achieve our group's goals	580	2.80	3.00	2.9	0.05	0.0025
34	I mobilize others with unusual efforts to do necessary things	544	2.96	2.48	2.72	-0.13	0.0169
Average					2.81		
Grand Average		7972	2.83	2.87	2.85		SD= 0.11

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between female students' knowledge of gender issues and their attitudes towards gender issues around them

Table 4

Difference between Female Students' Knowledge and Their Attitudes on Gender Issues

Variables	Mean	SD	N	Df	t-Cal	t-Critical	Remark
Female students' knowledge of gender issues from Social Studies	3.65	0.21	100				
				198	9.03**	1.960	H ₀₁ Rejected
Female students' Attitudes on GI	2.98	0.34	100				

**Significant, $p > 0.05$

Table 4 reveals that there is a statistically significant difference between female students' knowledge of gender issues and their attitude towards gender issues. The researchers therefore accept the alternate hypothesis that, there is a significant difference between female students' knowledge of gender issues and their attitude towards gender issues around them.

Discussion of Findings

As shown by NERDC (2012) curriculum on Social Studies and the inclusive topics, the high level of awareness on GI by the respondents indicates that Social Studies Knowledge dimension is positioned to address gender inequality in the society. This finding also aligned with Jorgensen's (2017) statement that Social Studies empowers the learners for effective relationships by developing them to become dynamic citizens. As noticed by Anyabelechi (2016) this high awareness might also be fuelled by the media coverage of gender issues thus increasing information possessed by the students. In tandem with EIGE (2014) and Anyabelechi (2016) of GBV as the largest of gender issues, the students' show of very high awareness of gender-based violence supports that earlier assertion. In corroboration of EIGE (2014), Anyabelechi (2016), and Olonade et al. (2021), the students had moderate high knowledge of all types of gender issues in the society.

Although values that influence desirable attitudes were harmonized across Social Studies topics in the curriculum (NERDC, 2012), the students generally showed a moderate level of right attitudes to respond to gender issues. The observed moderate attitude level might be due to what Abunimye et al. (2020) tagged as shortcomings from the unnecessary split of Social Studies into themes which affects not only the instruction, but also the procedures for teaching and the expected integrative approach to handling social issues. The harmonization curriculum further revealed that there is no teaching of values as distinct topics through Social Studies, resulting in a dis-service to the purpose of the subject (NERDC, 2012). The significant difference between knowledge and attitudes by the female students supports Morse's (2020) claim that, gender

inequality is still present in our society and not even the school has achieved the UN's clamouring to fully address gender issues. However, Junge et al. (2020) recognized the contributions from other socialization contexts apart from the school in developing students' social skills including online and offline platforms such as building relationships either at home or elsewhere with peers and adults. The students had moderate social skills or emotional intelligence generally to deal with gender issues around them as shown by the data result from Table 3. This might be due to inadequacies in students' activities through the teaching procedures observed as faulty (Abunimye et al., 2020). Although the curriculum stated the use of group learning activities, the opinion of students indicated otherwise meaning that they either have less exposure to group activities, lack positive role models or that the teachers failed to rightly teach emotional intelligence by their actions and words (Resilient Educator, 2020).

Conclusion

The study outcome indicates that Social Studies knowledge succinctly addresses gender issues through its topics and with the high knowledge of it as shown by the students. Also, access to the media might have contributed to the students' level of awareness on gender issues. There are seven core values harmonized across topics in the curriculum but no distinct teaching of values as topics was provided for by the curriculum planner. This possibly hinders Social Studies instruction, procedures and approach to values.

The outcome of social skills with emotional intelligence indicates poor access to sound abilities for productive interactions in the society. The splitting of Social Studies curriculum introduced by NERDC and the discontinuation of the subject at the senior secondary level denies the students opportunities to build values and social skills up to their late adolescent stage of life where their perspectives on issues would have become more sharpened. The statistically significant difference in knowledge and social skills imparted on the students points to dire need for improvement on Social Studies package for without the capacity to promote peace through gender equality, the pursuit of a new world order will be an effort in futility.

Recommendations

The NVE curriculum should be reinstated to its original form as Social Studies, and reviewed also to include current challenges globally and nationally for students' wellbeing. Values as distinct topics should be restored to Social Studies curriculum in order to have common focus and point of emphasis by the subject teachers irrespective of their location and experiences.

Teachers should upgrade their procedures of teaching to include modern child-centred approach with activities that enhance group dynamics among students across all strata of the society. This will improve the students' connection with the adults and their peers also.

The students are to endeavour to maximize every opportunity of interacting with others to improve on their relationship or social skills personally.

Moreover, the soft skills are identified as personal in nature and can be improved upon.

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